

SUPERBASE 2

MIRAMAR

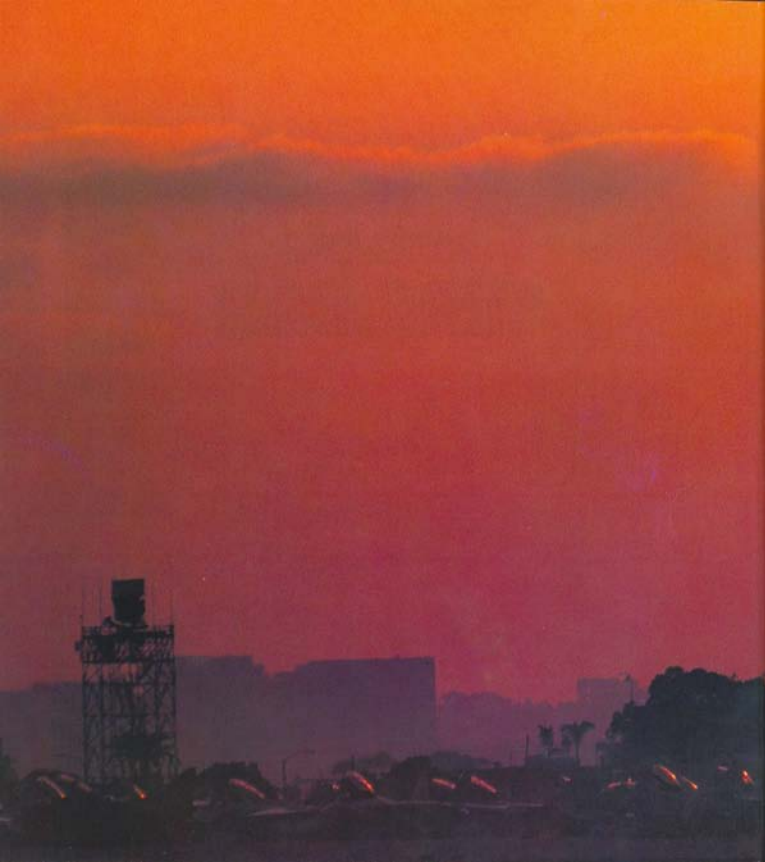
The Home of 'Top Gun'



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Front cover LCDR George Korson
prepares to preflight his VF-302
F-14 Tomcat at the start of the day's
flying

Title pages Pacific coast fog slips
toward NAS Miramar at sunset

Right T-2 Buckeye, used for
recurrent stall-spin training of F-14
aircrews



Introduction

They call NAS Miramar 'Fightertown USA', and with good reason. The sprawling Naval Air Station, some ten miles north of San Diego, California, is home base to almost half of the US Navy's carrier fighter squadrons. When these spectacular F-14 Tomcats aren't deployed at sea on their aircraft carriers, they're flying daily out of Miramar, practising fleet manoeuvres defence over the Pacific Ocean or yanking and banking in mock dogfights over the nearby desert. The traffic pattern around Miramar comes to life in the pre-dawn darkness, and things seldom quiet back down until after midnight.

And then there's Top Gun. The Navy Fighter Weapons School, begun after several dismal years of lacklustre dogfighting results over the skies of North Vietnam, is based in Hangar One at Miramar. The Navy's best fighter jocks come to Miramar in their F-14s, F/A-18s, and F-4s for a lightning-paced five-week course of instruction designed to make them a quantum jump better. Next door to Top Gun is the lair of the VF-126 'Bandits', the resident bad guys, who simulate enemy fighter tactics in their souped-up A-4 Skyhawks and, since late 1987, in the all-but-unbeatable F-16N Falcon. A Navy F-14 driver who can handle himself in a furball with the Top Gun instructors and the professional Gomers of VF-126 can probably do it right against any aerial threat in the world.

The base regulars are joined on the runways by scores of visitors every day. The Miramar squadrons love to mix it up with other fighters based in the American southwest, and the friendly adversaries gather at the base for before-and-after briefings. One might see F/A-18 Hornets from NAS Lemoore and the Marine base at El Toro, Harrier jump-jets from the Marine desert base at Yuma, Arizona, Air Force F-15s and F-16s out of fields in Phoenix and Las Vegas.

Also humming around the pattern are several squadrons of E-2C Hawkeyes, stately twin turboprops wearing rotating 24-foot radomes.

Few American bases can boast this intense level of tactical activity, day after day. It's a bird-watcher's dream. Let's get out on the ramp and see what's happening.

A word of warning: all US military bases are restricted to visitors, and access to flight lines is extremely difficult to arrange. Our thanks to the public affairs office at Miramar, in the persons of Lt Cmdr Ellis Wounmn and Lt Jeff Britton, for showing us around.

George Hall has been photographing and writing about American military aircraft for twenty years. He's accumulated thousands of photo hours in over a hundred different military and civilian aircraft types—everything from blimps to the hottest Mach 2 fighters. His other books include: *CV: Carrier Aviation* (Presidio Press); *USAFE: A Primer of Modern Air Combat in Europe* (Presidio Press); *Red Flag: Air Combat for the Eighties* (Presidio Press); *Marine Air: First to Fight* (Presidio Press); *Top Gun: The Navy Fighter Weapons School* (Presidio Press); and *Total Force: Flying with America's Reserve And Guard* (Thomasson-Grant).

Photographs were taken exclusively with Nikon cameras and lenses ranging from 16 mm fisheyes to 500 mm telephotos. With few exceptions, the film of choice is Kodachrome 64 slide film.

Right A 'Stuffed' E-2B Hawkeye radar-warning bird near Miramar's north gate. Plane is painted in colours of VAW-110, the west coast Hawkeye Replacement Air Group (RAG)

Contents

Introduction

1 Hot Hornets

2 Adversary Falcons

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Hot Hornets

Left CDR Jon 'Pops' Green, youthful skipper of VFA-303, the Navy's first reserve squadron to check out in the F/A-18 Hornet (background)

Above A Hornet of VFA-303 taxis for takeoff at Miramar. The extra underwing tanks double the aircraft's range





Top left Navy enlisted personnel man the busy Miramar tower

Above F/A-18 of east coast Marine squadron VMFA-451 lights up on the main runway for a Top Gun hop

Left Reserve Hornet waits in line for takeoff clearance

Right Marine ordnancemen load dummy Sidewinder missiles onto a VMFA-531 'Grey Ghosts' Hornet. Dummies have active seeker heads but no motors or explosives

Below Hornet of reserve CDR and MiG-killer Scott 'Mongoose' Davis





Top Gun student birds park alongside Hangar One during their five-week course of instruction









Preceding pages A two-ship of Navy Hornets heads for the Yuma, Arizona, ACM (air combat manoeuvring) range, about 125 km from Miramar

This page The versatile Hornet doubles as a strike bomber as well as a superb fighter aircraft. This Navy Reserve bird sports empty multiple-ejector bomb racks as it returns from a desert bombing range



Above A Hornet plugs into the KC-10's trailing fuel basket. Tanker 'track' is over the Pacific Ocean west of Miramar



Left Brand-new Hornet of VFA-15 'Valions' is assigned to the air wing of the equally new nuclear carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt*





Reserve Hornets pose beneath the refuelling window of an Air Force KC-10 tanker



Left F/A-18 of VFA-15 'Vallons' lifts easily in military power from the Miramar runway

This page Dogfighting Hornet puffs transonic vapour as it pulls heavy positive G in an ACM engagement







Marine Corps' Hornet of VMFA-323
'Death Rattlers' poses below the
open cargo ramp of its companion
Marine KC-130 Hercules tanker over
the Pacific tanker track





A Hornet driver snaps his wingman as they head back to Miramar after an overwater intercept mission







Preceding pages and these pages
Marine Corps' Hornets of VMFA-531
'Grey Ghosts', based at MCAS El
Toro, up the freeway from Miramar.
Pilot, (right) photographed during
his recent stint as a Top Gun
student, is Capt John "Lips" Durkin





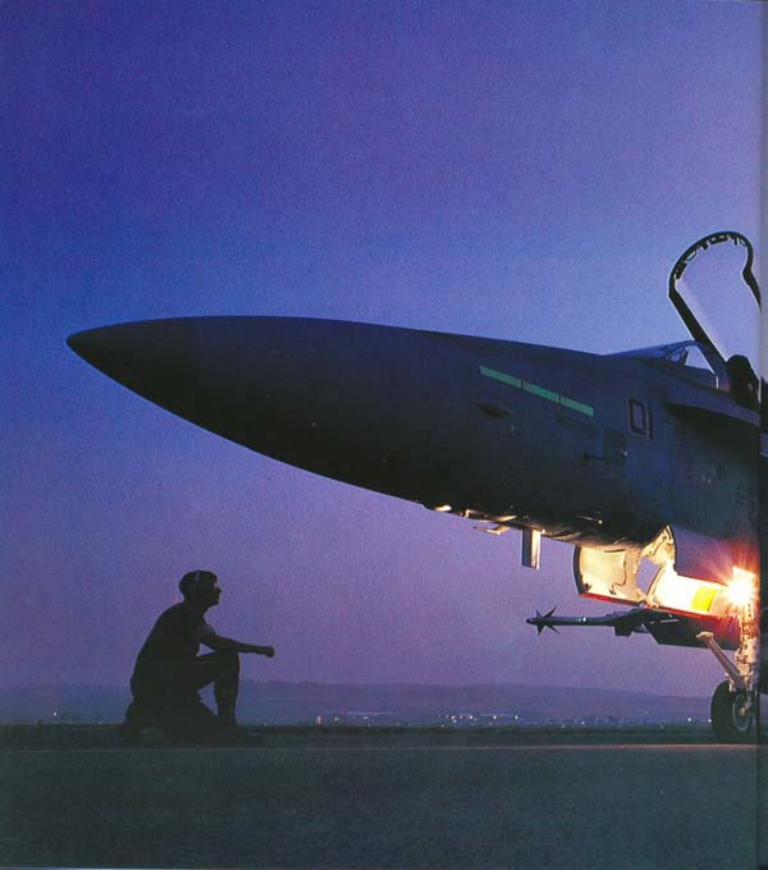


This page and overleaf The Navy's crack flight demonstration team, the Blue Angels, transitioned in 1987 to the F/A-18 Hornet after a decade of performing in the little A-4 Skyhawk. These shots were taken at Miramar's annual summer open house and air show







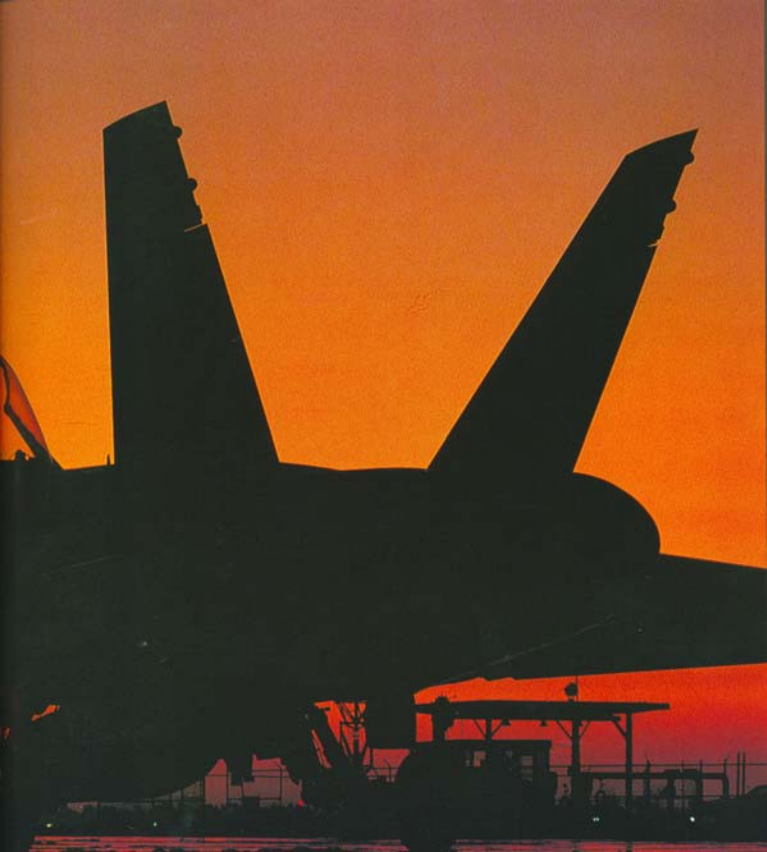


A Marine Hornet runs through ground checks at Miramar prior to a night intercept hop



Marine Capt Tim "Tiny" Timm (tiny, of course, at 6 ft 4 in) checks his dummy Sidewinder before a dawn launch

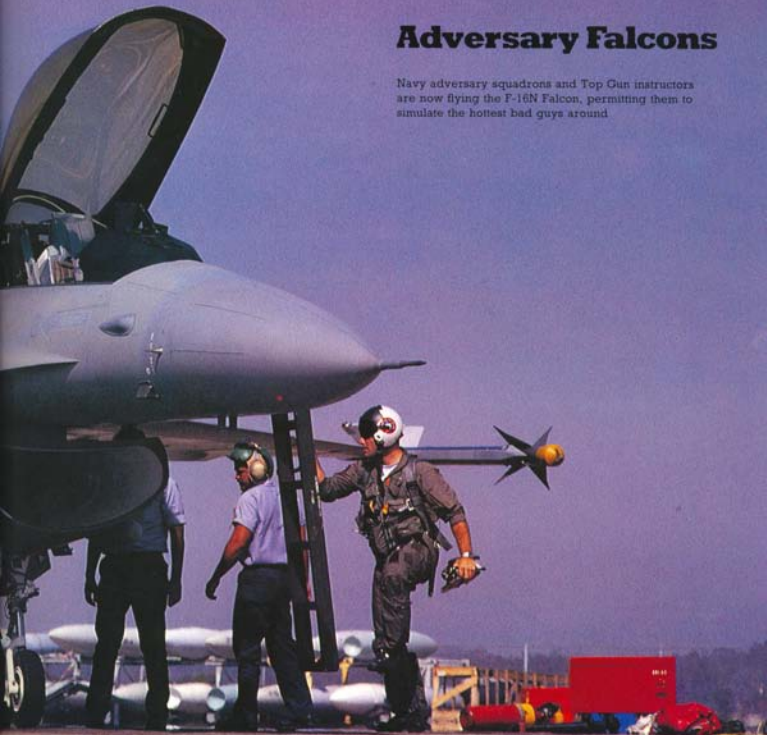






Adversary Falcons

Navy adversary squadrons and Top Gun instructors are now flying the F-16N Falcon, permitting them to simulate the hottest bad guys around



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Top Gun Falcons are perhaps the world's hottest variants of this great fighter: fitted with the gutsy GE F110 engine (note the different con/di nozzle), they have been stripped of any excess weight—weapons delivery systems, gun, etc







Above Civilian-contract mechanics service the Falcons of the Top Gun school and of the VF-126 'Bandits', Miramar's resident aggressor squadron

Left and overleaf Top Gun dogfighting maestro Ted 'Pyro' Hendricks fires up and heads for the Yuma range, there to make mincemeat of a hapless student!





This page Adversary F-16 is joined by a huge F-14 Tomcat for the customary landing 'break' over the Miramar runway. The Falcon is not all that small; it's the Tomcat that's enormous

Aggressor F-5s

Highly-regarded F-5E Tigers are now being retired at Miramar as the new F-16Ns arrive. These Top Gun birds, done up in various Middle Eastern and Warsaw Pact camouflage schemes, will relocate to the fast-growing Naval Air Station at Fallon, Nevada









Main Picture Two-seat Top Gun F-5F waits with a Navy A-4 Skyhawk as a Beech C-12 executive transport dawdles in on an instrument approach

Inset Civilian Northrop mechanic gives the 'light up' sign to Top Gun executive officer LCDR Tom 'Otter' Otterbein in his F-5E





Mongoose

Left Top Gun A-4 gets waved off for another go-around when a large transport is slow in clearing the active runway

Right LCDR Roger 'Muff' Dadiamoff, adversary A-4 pilot with Miramar's Reserve Gomer squadron, VC-13

Below A Navy jet pilot's first carrier landings will be made in a T-2 Buckeye trainer (foreground). The student will then transition to the much hotter A-4 Skyhawk (background) for the remainder of his advanced jet training





The VF-126 'Bandits' operate ancient one- and two-seat A-4 Skyhawks as well as factory-fresh F-16N Falcons



Right A Top Gun A-4 Mongoose, fitted with a huge Pratt & Whitney P-8 engine, lights the wick for takeoff

Below Although designed as a low-level attack plane, the A-4 is a fearsome dogfighter in expert hands. The Top Gun jets have been stripped of all extra weight and stuffed with large P-8 engines, allowing them to stay in the fight with just about anyone

Far right During the filming of *Top Gun* over the California desert, 'Iceman's' F-14 is trailed by Top Gun skipper 'Viper' in an A-4 Mongoose









Top Gun and VF-126 Skyhawks
await their mounts as an E-2
Hawkeye shoots approaches



Left VF-126 Bandit birds carry red stars and large nose numbers in the Soviet mode

Below and right Top Gun and VF-126 A-4s are among the oldest jets in the entire Navy inventory. They are beautifully maintained despite their age, but they require huge amounts of maintenance to keep them operational in the harsh ACM environment







These pages The A-4 Mongoose is painted in a variety of colour schemes which are designed to simulate the warpaint worn by likely threat aircraft around the world





Tomcat

Following pages Tomcats of Miramar's VF-111 'Sundowners' over the lush Imperial Valley of southern California.













This page Tomcat of the Miramar Replacement Air Group, or RAG, the unit which trains brand-new jet pilots in the intricacies of the F-14

Right and overleaf F-14A Tomcat of Miramar squadron VF-124 'Gunfighters' wows the crowd at the Miramar open house. Note different positions of the Tomcat's variable-geometry wings











Main picture Tomcat of VF-194 'Red Lightnings' blasts out of Miramar in full afterburner. This venerable squadron is being dissolved into other Miramar outfits in a cost-cutting move. **Inset A** Tomcat of VF-124 lets it all hang out









Preceding pages and main picture Tomcat of one of Miramar's two Naval Reserve squadrons, the VF-302 'Stallions', poses for the photographer over the Yuma ACM range.

Below A RAG Tomcat done up in imaginary squadron markings for the movie *Top Gun*. Maverick's nemesis Lt Tom 'Ice-man' Kazansky is at the stick

Left RAG Tomcat turns and burns during the filming of *Top Gun*









These pages, overleaf and following pages F-14 Tomcat of VF-302 photographed below the boom operator's window of a KC-10 Extender tanker







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LT. HUSTON, WO. 11







Top photos Tomcat of the VF-124 RAG painted up especially for the 1987 air show tour. Miramar is known throughout American naval aviation as 'Fightertown USA'



Left RAG Tomcat practices touch-and-go landings in the background as an east-coast F-14 awaits its Top Gun student crew



Opposite below and left Impeccable F-14 of east coast squadron VF-84 'Jolly Rogers' parked on the Top Gun student ramp. Zero-zero, or 'double nuts', designation, on tail, indicates that this is the aircraft of the carrier's chief pilot, the Commander of the Air Group, or CAG



Inset Top Gun classes are like a navy fighter pilot convention. Bird on left is from VF-41 'Black Aces', the outfit that bagged two Libyan *Fitters* in the Gulf of Sidra. The others, left to right: VF-102 'Diamondbacks', VF-33 'Starfighters', VF-84 'Jolly Rogers'

Main picture Typical student ramp during a Top Gun class will see visiting birds from as many as ten different F-14, F/A-18, and (for a short while longer) F-4 squadrons







Inset Navy seamen, swabbing down a VF-41 Tomcat, are dwarfed by the immense fighter

Above CAG Tomcat off the carrier USS *America* is readied for a wash

Main picture Miramar Tomcat gets the clean-up treatment as a visiting Marine Corps' TA-4J Skyhawk waits its turn





A Tomcat of one of the long-time resident Miramar squadrons, the VF-211 'Checkmates'



Above Plane captain rides the brakes as his F-14, freshly washed, is towed back to the Top Gun student line



Left Two Skyhawk pilots of the VF-126 'Bandits' walk in after a bout of dogfighting. Note mock Soviet insignia on their blue flight suits



On any given day, over a hundred F-14s will share the mile-long ramp at Miramar



Below East coast F-14 Tomcat arrives at the start of a five-week Top Gun class





This page Detailed briefings lasting over an hour precede virtually every tactical flight out of Miramar. VF-302 skipper CDR John Ed 'Tiger' Kerr, right, is in charge

Right All flying Navy personnel are required to undergo two days of gruelling water survival training every three years. This helicopter crewman is doing his requisite 15 minutes of 'drown-proofing', or treading water, in full flight gear. Try it sometime!



Reservist LCDR George Korson runs two manufacturing businesses in San Deigo as well as flying several times a week with VF-302 'Stallions'





SHORE RT. PC AMB J FICE GSE
EVEKT
PC AMMAR DOLLY PARTER

VF-302





Top Carved-wood logo of the Navy Fighter Weapons School—Top Gun—shows a Commie MiG-21 in deep kim chi



Middle Seated in 'Hollywood' Dishart's Top Gun F-5E is Air Force Capt Joe Leister, guest instructor on the Top Gun faculty

Bottom VF-302 skipper 'Tiger' Kerr about to taxi out

Far left A trio of AIM-7 Sparrow radar-guided air-to-air missiles being loaded onto a Miramar F-14 for a live shoot over the Pacific missile range



A two-ship of VF-302 Tomcats slides easily away from Miramar. The back-seater is squadron flight surgeon Connie 'Doc' Ward, a Vietnam vet in the rear cockpit of the F-4 Phantom









Inset Tomcat pulls the gear as it lights out of Miramar in full afterburner.

Main picture Zone V afterburner again, as a VF-184 Tomcat is catapulted from the deck of the carrier USS Constellation. Miramar is home base for more than a dozen carrier squadrons—F-14 Tomcats and E-3 Hawkeyes.



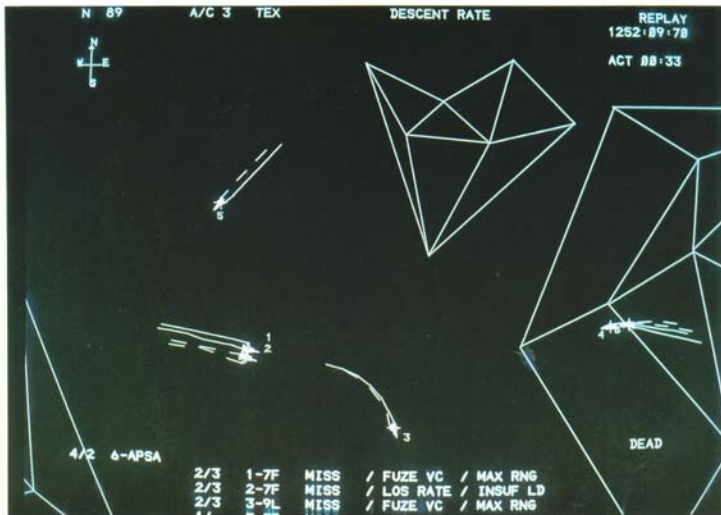
Right Tomcats motor their huge wings forward as they pull out of the landing break over the Miramar runway

Below Control positions in the TACTS trailer at Miramar. Dogfights over the Yuma range can be observed in real time or taped for later debriefing on the colour displays





Below Close-up of the TACTS display. Birds 1 and 2 are about to call missile shots on the desperately-turning No 3. But they'd better pay attention to No 4, sneaking in low over the Chocolate Mountains!







Mid-range Sparrow air-to-air missile is fired at a pilotless drone over the Pacific Ocean west of Miramar. Shooter is a Tomcat of VF-302 'Stallions'.





Main picture Miramar's other tenants, aside from the fighters, are the Grumman E-2C Hawkeye airborne early-warning craft. The bird lifting off is attached to VAW-114 'Hornet Hawks'

This picture Miramar Tomcats snap into a perfect 4G break over the carrier USS *Constellation*

Tomcat slips in over the strobes as dusk settles on Miramar







On the boat

On the boat Model builders love the VF-21 'Freelancers', a Tomcat squadron that hangs on by the fingernails to the old-fashioned shiny enamel paint. This beautiful specimen is circling its home away from home, the USS *Constellation*





Top left Catapult officer on *Connie* gives the classic 'launch' signal to an F-14. The 30-ton bird will accelerate past 150 mph in just over 2 seconds!

Bottom left 'Freelancers' Tomcat takes a dusk cat shot aboard *Connie*

Main picture Hornets line the foredeck of the USS *Ranger* as a Tomcat is hurled from one of the waist catapults





Roast deflector is raised behind each jet prior to the cat shot. It's no optical illusion: the forward edge of the deck is only 800 feet in front of the pilot.









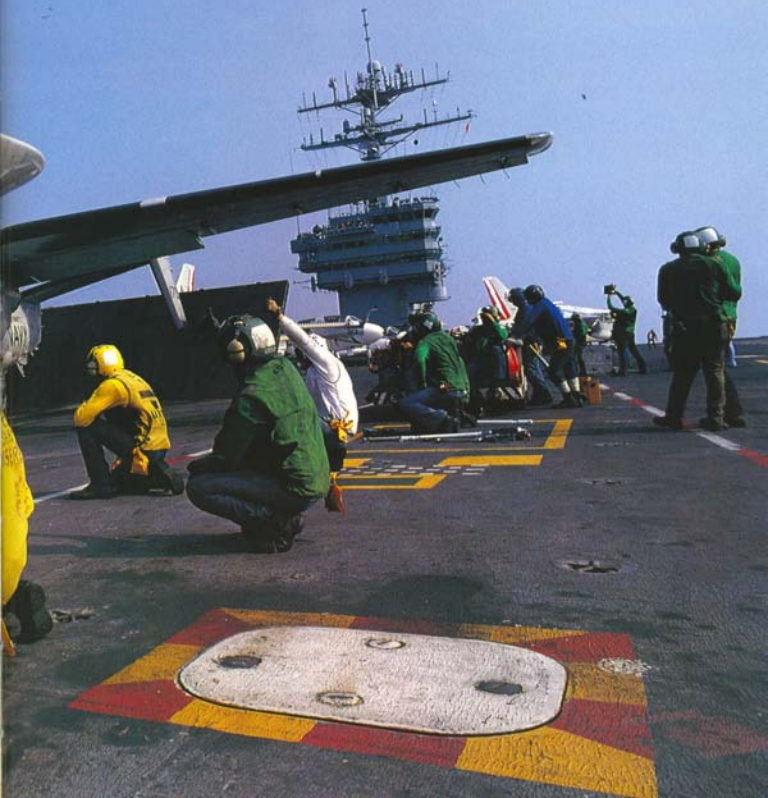
Left Reserve Hornets, and a lone A-7 Corsair, receive taxi hand signals aboard *USS Ranger*

Above Hornet driver about to get the ride of his life aboard *Ranger*

Below Hornet storms down the port bow cat of *Ranger*; his wingman in the starboard track will be only seconds behind

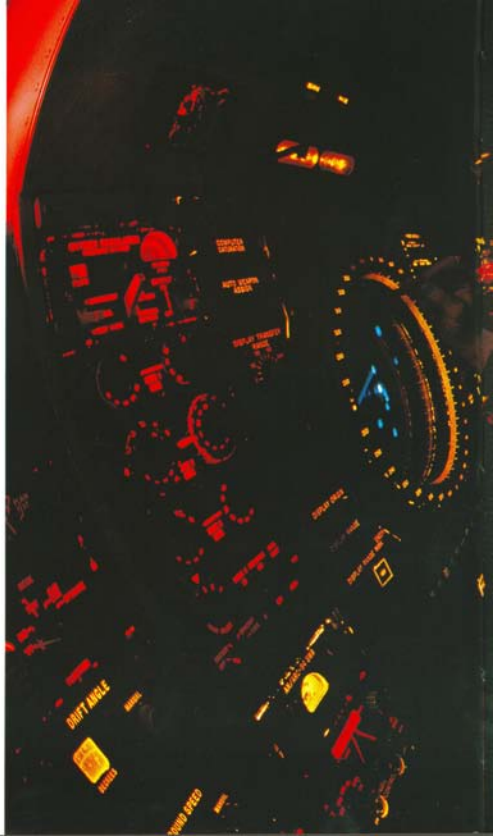






Preceding pages Now it's the Hawkeye's turn. Nicknamed the 'Hummer', the big turboprop has a reputation for being a terrible handful around the carrier deck

Right The Hawkeye is flown by a crew of two, while three combat controllers man the scopes in back. Fleet-defence fighters are vectored toward potential threats by this trio of 'scope dopes' aboard the Hummer







Above A gaggle of radar and radio antennas are contained inside the Hawkeye's rotating dome. The amazing airborne control centre can track anything that moves, on or above the sea, in some 3 million cubic miles of airspace

Right 'Hormel Hawks' E-2C approaches the boat. All Navy pilots have high regard for Hummer drivers, since the plane is infamous for three-axis squirreliness in the landing configuration

Last page Marine Corps' Reserve F-4 Phantom blasts out of Miramar into a matchless Pacific sunset





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